DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 572 CS 215 912

AUTHOR	Jaffe, Barbara
TITLE	Student Success in College Composition through the Puente Project Model.
PUB DATE	Mar 97
NOTE	17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (48th, Phoenix, AZ, March 12-15, 1997).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Instruction; *English Instruction; High Schools; Higher Education; Mentors; Mexican Americans; Models; *Nontraditional Students; *Self Esteem; Student College Relationship; *Student Empowerment; Student Improvement; *Student Motivation; Student Needs; Two Year Colleges; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS	Hispanic American Students; *Puente Project CA

ABSTRACT

Much can be learned from California's Puente Project Model that would help students' success in classrooms as well as in college in general, and in their daily lives. Puente, which means "bridge" in Spanish, began in 1982 at Chabot College in northern California and is now in 38 colleges and 19 high schools statewide. Originally designed for Mexican-American students, the project's purpose is to provide a bridge for students from community colleges to 4-year institutions; it is open to all students. The year-long project is comprised of two English classes, personal and academic counseling, and visits with paired mentors. Based on the Puente model, student confidence is one of the keys to success. Confidence is built for Mexican Americans through reading Latino literature, traditional literature, and writing, rewriting, and sharing students' "works in progress" with their "familias" (groups of 4-5 students who establish confidence among each other so they can read and share each other's papers). In the beginning of the year, minimal emphasis is placed on correct grammar usage, instead focusing on expression and enabling students to write what they are trying to communicate. Collaterally, through the counseling component, the intensive academics in English composition and the mentoring component, the Puente project gives students a "voice" and empowers them to live rich, personally fulfilling lives knowing they can succeed in academia, the job market, and in interpersonal relationships. (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 409 572

Student Success in College Composition through the Puente Project Model

Barbara Jaffe

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN **OTHER THAN PAPER COPY** HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B. Jaffe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

AS215512

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

There is much that can be learned from the Puente Project Model that would help in our students' success in our classrooms as well as in college in general, and in their daily lives. First, it is important to describe the Puente Project or Program to you. "Puente" which means "bridge" in Spanish, began in 1982 at Chabot College in Northern California by an English instructor, Pat McGrath, and a counselor, Felix Galaviz. In the most general sense, its goal is to provide a bridge for students from community colleges to 4-year institutions. The program was originally designed for Mexican-American students but is open to all students. Through studies it has been found that, Latino students have the highest drop-out rate in our educational system. One third of Latinos drop out before graduating from high school and fewer than 5% are eligible for U.C.'s. Over 80 % of Mexican-American students do enroll in higher education in the community colleges, yet 50% leave without receiving a degree and very few transfer. These students generally also have very weak writing skills, study habits and self-confidence in their academic abilities. Therefore, the main goal of the Puente

Project, now in 38 colleges and in 19 high schools statewide, is to get the students to transfer, as I said before, to 4-year universities. Thus, the focus of my talk today is on the strategies which make the Puente Project so successful as well as its positive implications for all of our composition students. The success of this Project in terms of numbers is quite close to 50% of the students statewide who complete the year long program matriculate to 4-year institutions. Our students make up 19% of all Latino transfer students entering the University of California. Many of these students return to become Mentors in the Puente Project. First, before I explain the mentoring component, I will focus on the origanization of the English classroom and hope that through my brief description of the Program, you will be able to adapt some of the "philosophy" to your own classrooms..

The year-long Puente Project is not just comprised of two English classes. A group of roughly 25-30 students begin in pre-1A, developmental English, and continue on to Freshman Composition, yet the students receive much more than English training. Student success stems from a combination of the

writing class, plus the personal and academic counseling, and the visits with a paired mentor. All these elements work together to help the student prepare for transfer to the university, and even more, to become successful in the world.

The problem that many of our college students have today is a lack of confidence built on years of feeling inadequate in the basics--math and English skills, to be specific. The students at the developmental level (previously and unfortunately often still called "remedial") are at the biggest risk of dropping out of college because they are specifically vulnerable to our comments. There truly is no way getting around the fact that what comes out of our mouths and what we write on students' papers really do affect them. Many of our developmental students have a fear of making a mistake and don't see writing and math as a challenge and a chance to learn and grow. Rather, they remember the horrible experiences they had in high school and the humiliation that often followed when they made a mistake and ultimately failed.

As college professors today at the end of the 20th century,

we are not just instructors any more. We are required to provide more than just academics. Many of us may not like this "new" job detail, but we ultimately have no choice. Now with retention becoming a major concern and focus for our colleges and our classrooms, we are looked upon more and more to provide services that surpass the mere dissemination of the material we studied in graduate school. How, then, can we help our students to stay in our classrooms, in our colleges and become successful both in our courses and in life? First, we must set our students up to be successful and not to fail. There is no doubt that some students will fail, yet it will be their failure and not ours because we will have done everything humanly possible to prevent this. We can go to sleep at night knowing that while we cannot save the entire population of students at our colleges, we can at least help the ones we come in contact with as best as we can with whatever means we have.

Thus, based on the Puente model, confidence is one of the keys to success. The real challenge is building confidence through writing, remembering that most of these students'

negative experiences came from their past English classes. They did not have the reading and writing skills either because English was their second language or just because they were set up to fail. I cannot not tell you how many of my students have told me not only were they NOT encouraged by their teachers but were discouraged in pursuing writing. In fact, I, too, was once told I was a terrible writer with no future in the field. Yet, I had loving role models around me who could negate these hurtful, demeaning words. Many of our students, and most of my Puente students are lacking these role models to whom they can look for support and "positive strokes". Part of the Puente Program is to allow the students a chance to find their "Writer's Voice", which isn't easy since many have no voice built on years of hating English and actually having read not one complete novel in their lives.

The first semester's readings are based on the wealth of Latino literature. Authors such as Sandra Cisneros, Luis Rodriguez, Richard Rodriguez, Gary Soto, Victor Villa Senor, Mary Helen Ponce and Graciela Limon are among many

outstanding writers who have opened the door to the enjoyment of reading for our Puente students. There is no sense introducing *The Great Gatsby* if the students cannot relate to Fitzgerald at this stage in their English studies and development. We introduce Latino writers whose voices reflect the experiences our students have grown up with and whose literature delves into cultural and family roles indicative of Latino life in America. Yet, one of the central themes of this literature is searching for a place in society, trying to find a nitch within this huge society of whites, blacks, Asians, etc... and not losing part of ourselves. Such issues aren't so different than any from traditional works. The voices of these Latino authors are embraced in the Puente readings only to allow for acceptance and realization that what these students, new to academia, crave is to finally be TAUGHT how to learn. They do this beautifully by enjoying and relating to their readings. The second semester is spent on introducing the traditional literature, essays and articles needed as part of freshman composition. By this point, four months into the Program, students have built a foundation of trust for their own

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

writings and trust for me, their professor, who they see as their advocate and champion for their successes. How many of us have read essays from students which are appalling and questionable as to their language origin? In other words, we ask ourselves, red pen in hand, "Is this English I am reading?" I have had many students enter the program with the most primitive of writing skills and have always seen their transformation into writers. I can honestly say 100% of the time, these students, if they are committed to improving, actually successfully learn to write academically so they can compete in all of their other classes. If I had to communicate to you today what is the one way to allow and create this success it would be to show students their writing voices. From the first day, they write and rewrite. They share their 'works in progress' with their "familias"--groups of 4-5 students who over the period of time, establish confidence among each other so they can read and share each other's papers, responding with "strong lines" and "questions".

Our "familias", or families, are often based on personalities that the counselor is privy to. These groups are also valuable

tools for establishing responsibility--student responsibility. Exchanging phone numbers, creating a rotating group leader and out of class requirements to complete assignments, gives the "flaky" student a chance to become more organized and answer, not to us, the professors, but to fellow students--often a harder audience to contend with. Establishing familias early on (within the first week of the semester) gives students one more reason to keep coming to class; they will not only let their professors down by not coming to class (which believe it or not students will care about when you show them that you care about them) but they will let their peers down. Of course, some students will still not care, but based on the Puente Model, groups, families, become fiercely loyal and seek each other out. Members learn who the stronger writers are and actually form student groups and tutoring sessions to work on writing and also math. The underlying component of these groups is the trust that is created among these 4-5 students.

Once familias have been established, these groups serve as writing groups. Within these groups, the participants will find

themselves laughing and crying together and will also learn to be angry. They will learn responsibility and their familias will represent a microcosm of what their lives and relationships hold for them. If a student is having a rough time getting along with a family member, he might take this attitude to his group and act out with his fellow students. He learns, therefore, how to deal with his own problems at home. Problems students have in their private lives often find their way to the Puente classroom. The groups become a safe haven for our students and their writings are shared within these groups. Of course, students reflect on their high school English class days where they might have been paralyzed with fear when having to stand up in front of the class to read a paper. Our Puente students know that they will ALWAYS be sharing their essays with their groups, and they grow to trust their group members for their responses and suggestions that will come after a reading. Before the students are asked to listen to and help their fellow group members with a paper, the teacher and counselor must model the same activity. Both the counselor and teacher are writing during an in-class

writing assignment and will share these essays in front of the class with each other so the students can see what they will need to do. In the early weeks of the developmental level English class, the counselor and teacher will sit in front of the class with chairs facing each other. They will read their papers to each other and the listener will only say "Thank you" after having heard the paper being read by her colleague. Also, she will announce a Strong Line that was remembered in the paper, saying "A strong line for me was..." The writer then takes a pen and underlines this strong line. No comments other than "Thank You" and a strong line are made. No one will be saying "Oh that was good, or boring or whatever". When students know that there will be no comments, good or otherwise, it frees them up to be very comfortable with their own writing. Likewise, the reader must not begin his reading with the standard apology, "I didn't really know what I was supposed to write on" or "This isn't one of my better essays". Students are taught early on that everything they write is a "work in progress" and can, theoretically be worked on for many months to come. As trust builds and the

students feel more comfortable with their sharing within their groups, they can move past the "strong lines" and "thank you's". Again, the counselor and the teacher model essays or "quick writes" where the listener will then ask at least 3 questions based on the essay that was just read. These questions must be written down by the writer (reader) and answered in his next draft. Questions are another way of saying" You didn't mention this in your essay and the reader really needs to know this information". It is a successful, positive and safe way to say that something is missing from the writing. By the time a final draft is handed in, I read an essay that is rich in details and alive with passion. I couldn't say this before teaching through the Puente writing model. There's a saying that "life is what happens when you're making plans." In Puente, "writing is what happens when you're teaching in a Puente class."

In the beginning of the year, minimal emphasis is placed on correct grammar usage. Rather, the focus is on expression and just enabling the students to write what they are trying to communicate. Once the ideas are actually on the paper, even

though fragments and run-ons abound, the structure can be dealt with at a later date. In fact, students, when reading their papers out loud, often find their own errors and self-correct. Also, minimal emphasis is initially placed on organization of writing. This is also approached at a later date. Having a Linguistic background, I find myself eagerly wanting to use my red pen, but I literally have to sit on it for a couple of months until the students are ready to get into some heavier grammar analysis. All I can say is that this method of delayed correction and focusing on content initially, works 100% of the time. The students immediately get caught up in the literature they are reading and without even realizing it, they begin to emulate the Latino authors to whom they can relate. Furthermore, by the second semester, they are writing in all the rhetorical modes and are familiar with critical, expository writing as well as poetry analysis. Their research papers, often on controversial topics are rich in detail and follow MLA format better than the average freshman composition student. I believe the reason why the Puente students are so successful in their writing by the

end of the 36 weeks, or two semesters, is because they have been given a VOICE. As English professors, we know that this is a gift that can never be taken away, rather it can only be cultivated into a wealth of writing and reading, which is our ultimate goal for ALL of our students.

The Mentor component of the Puente Project allows for professionals from the community to provide positive role models and a sounding board for our students' future concerns and questions relating to higher education and jobs. The Mentors are also a part of the classroom as they give presentations and are involved in two papers which are assignment based on a Mentor character study and research on the Mentor's profession. Because the Puente Program has been at our college for 11 years, many of our past Puente students are now professionals and mentors themselves!

Students are also provided with campus tours of California universities to reinforce the Program's focus which is not whether they will matriculate to the university, but **where** they will ultimately attend. Students are also given two-year

educational plans by the counselor with their entire schedules mapped out. In this way, they can make a long term commitment to their studies and know exactly what is required of them. The counselor attends all of the English classes, also.

As John Dewey points out, "Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only that particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future." As educators, then, we don't have a choice about whether our students learn collateral lessons. Collateral learning is not some educational fad we can ignore, hoping it will pass by like so many other trends dejour. Collateral learning exists whether we attend to it or not! It always has and it always will. Our only choice is whether we will make a conscious effort to influence our students' enduring attitudes and resulting behaviors. The

California Puente Project, therefore, focuses both overtly and collaterally on all of the traits we want our students to have in order for them to be successful in life: self-responsibility, self-motivation, self-management, interdependence, self-esteem and active and life-long learning to name just a few. Collaterally, through the counseling component, the intensive academics in English composition and the Mentoring component, the Puente Project empowers students to live rich, personally fulfilling lives knowing they CAN succeed in academia, the job market and in inter-personal relationships. I truly feel honored to be part of this awe-inspiring program and hope that my talk today has inspired you to take these ideas back to your own campuses and classrooms and employ them. Thank you.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE